



PRESS RELEASE

House Armed Services Committee

Floyd D. Spence, Chairman

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OPENING STATEMENT

CHAIRMAN FLOYD D. SPENCE

HOUSE ARMED SERVICES COMMITTEE

OPEN HEARING WITH SERVICE SECRETARIES

Today the committee concludes its initial oversight hearings on the Fiscal Year 2000 defense budget request. Joining us are our three service secretaries:

- The Honorable Luis Caldera, Secretary of the Army;
- The Honorable John Danzig, Secretary of the Navy; and
- The Honorable F. Whitten Peters, Acting Secretary of the Air Force.

This year's defense debate has been framed by two overriding issues—resources and risk. In seven weeks of testimony, and after hearing from more than 300 witnesses. The consistent message we have heard is that the Department of Defense is under-resourced and that the ability of the services to execute the national military strategy is increasingly at risk.

This year began with the promise that the Administration's Fiscal Year 2000 budget request "represented a major turnaround following years of decreased spending on defense". For those of us on the Committee, Republican and Democrat alike, who have witnessed more than a decade of decline, this was good news. It seemed that the Administration had finally confronted the stark reality of declining readiness, degraded quality of military life and delayed modernization.

As we all now know, unfortunately, the President's budget fell short of addressing the critical unfunded requirements identified by the Joint Chiefs of Staff.

First, the President's defense budget request does not represent not a real increase, but instead, a real decline in defense spending.

Second, much of the real spending increase in the Administration's six-year defense plan comes after the President leaves office, and all of it is contingent upon Social Security reform and on exceeding the spending limits contained in the Balanced Budget Act.

(cont)

Third, almost all of the alleged “increase” in the Fiscal Year 2000 budget relies upon creative accounting and optimistic assumptions.

Fourth, even if the Administration’s budget were to be approved in full, it would still fall well short of satisfying the critical unfunded requirements identified by the nation’s military leadership.

Finally, and on a broader strategic level, the Administration’s six year plan does not change the “moderate to high risk” now associated with the services’ ability to execute the National Military Strategy.

Our theater commanders in Southwest Asia and Korea have each expressed their concerns about the risk involved in having to fight a second major theater war. They fear the consequences of deployment delays, lost territory, and – especially in Korea – the unacceptable number of casualties that would result. In Europe, yesterday we significantly expanded our commitment in the Balkans. Our open-ended missions in Bosnia, Macedonia and now probably in Kosovo are consuming a disproportionate share of U.S. forces. This pattern of declining defense resources and increasing risk is dangerous.

Our witnesses play a critical and unique role in ensuring the readiness of America’s soldiers, sailors, airmen and Marines. As the civilian leaders of the military departments, our witnesses are leaders of and advocates for the troops. Accordingly, I look forward to this morning’s testimony.

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